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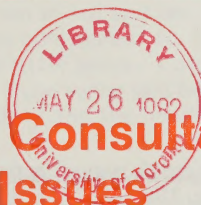
Status



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The Second Annual Consultation on Women's Issues

On November 22, 23 and 24, the Ontario Status of Women Council hosted the second annual provincial consultation on women's issues. The delegates, representing women's groups across the province, presented their concerns to Council in an open forum, heard speakers, watched films and debated topics of concern to women. A major theme of the conference was older women and delegates were invited to respond to Council's draft report on the subject, entitled Women and Aging.

Women and Aging profiles the status of older women in Ontario with reference to marital status, income and living arrangements. In addition, it looks at areas of concern to the elderly such as health, housing and income security. The report shows that while aging concerns everyone, older women face particular difficulties because they live longer than men, are more likely to be widowed and living alone and less likely to have adequate incomes. It points out, for example, that the majority of older men are married and living with their wives, but the majority of older women are unmarried - widowed, divorced or separated. While there is a strong possibility of poverty for all women over 65, unmarried women are many times more likely to be poor. Of all unmarried women, close to half of those over 65 and two-thirds over 75 have incomes below the poverty line.

The report urged that immediate measures be taken to provide financial relief for the present generation of older unmarried women. We are pleased to report that following release of the study, the Ontario government increased family benefits rates for single women between the ages of 60 to 64. But financial relief is only a stop gap measure. Since women's poverty in old age is closely linked to their life pattern before retirement, the report urges long term measures to protect future generations of women. Steps must be taken to improve women's status in the labour force through educational initiatives, equal pay for work of equal value, affirmative action and expansion of childcare facilities. The agenda for pension reform is a long one and of highest priority. Women in the workforce need increased access to pension plans which take into account their special work patterns. Since they often work part time and have interrupted careers because of child bearing and rearing, their needs are quite different from men's. Women working in the home must have access to some form of pension security in their own right.

Jean Woodsworth of Canadian Pensioners Concerned, Jean Wood, President of the National Action Committee and Doug Rapelje, Chairman, Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens, served as resource people for a discussion of major issues relating to older women such as health, housing, and pension reform.

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From Where I Stand



Lynne Gordon
Chairperson
Ontario Status
of Women Council

In reviewing Council's annual reports, briefs and newsletters I am struck by several recurring themes - the need to adopt the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and move to a legislated affirmative action plan; the need for a comprehensive childcare policy and the need to modernize the pension system for all Canadians, but in particular for women.

Beginning in 1976 the Council called for Ontario to adopt the "drop-out" provision of the Canada Pension Plan which would allow women to leave the labour force during childbearing years for a period of up to seven years without losing Canada Pension credits. This feature has been available to women in the Province of Quebec since 1975 through the Quebec Pension Plan.

The drop-out provision gained further support when it was proposed by Ontario's Royal Commission on the State of Pensions which reported in 1981. Advisory Councils at the federal level and in eight provinces, and major women's groups across Canada have called for Ontario to accept the "drop-out" provision which would effectively ensure that this benefit was available to all Canadian women.

Finally, in its report released in early April, the Ontario Select Committee on Pensions endorsed the proposal of the Royal Commission on the State of Pensions in Ontario that:

The Government of Ontario should approve the amendment of the CPP for the child-rearing drop-out provision as now legislated, to take effect without delay.

I commend the Select Committee on Pensions for their excellent report which endorses many of the Royal Commission's proposals to benefit women. I urge the Government of Ontario to act now to modernize the pension system in Ontario.

The Second Annual Consultation on Women's Issues (continued)

Delegates to the Consultation received the draft report of Women and Aging enthusiastically and made a valuable contribution toward the development of the final report to be submitted to Ontario government later in 1982.

In addition to the discussion on aging, the consultation dealt with follow up on several of Council's initiatives including a brief on widow's rights to family property, action on the Constitution and the brief on Employment Strategies for Women in the 1980's. Much of the discussion focussed on the impact of technology on women's traditional jobs. The automation of clerical and related jobs is having a large effect on women's employment. If present trends continue, up to one million women could be unemployed by 1990 as automation threatens to eliminate between 30 and 40 per cent of jobs such as bank teller, telephone operator and clerk typist. Heather Menzies, author of Women and the Chip and Dr. Allan Wolfson of the Ontario Manpower Commission took part in the panel discussion on the topic of women and technology.

Once again this year, Council is encouraged by the success of the Consultation process. We look forward to future work with women's groups across the province to improve the status of women in Ontario.

Single Mothers and Welfare Fraud

In recent months, Council has become increasingly alarmed about the harsh sentences given single mothers convicted of 'welfare fraud'. Almost invariably charges have been laid because a female welfare recipient has failed to declare she is living with a man. In January of this year, three Ontario mothers were sentenced to jail for periods ranging from 3 months to a year for collecting family benefits while living with a man.

In the past few years, there have been about 50 similar prosecutions, 15 are now before the courts and 30 under investigation. While society cannot condone illegal acts such as fraud, the punishment should fit the crime. Tax evaders, who often cheat the government of more in one year than a family benefits recipient could in several, rarely, if ever, go to jail. Surely, spending public money to maintain a woman in jail and her children in foster care as punishment for taking public money makes little sense. Community service might make more sense and better serve the interest of society and the needs of mothers and children.

Further, it seems that women convicted of 'welfare fraud' for living with a man while collecting benefits are often victims of an antiquated law. Ontario law assumes that if a man moves in with a welfare mother and her children, he immediately becomes head of the household and must assume responsibility for their support. The assumption that a man is always financially and emotionally capable of this responsibility needs to be re-evaluated. In particular, attention must be paid to the discrepancy between changing social values which permit other members of society to have temporary live-in relationships without financial commitment and family benefits laws which deny single mothers on welfare the same option. It should be pointed out that the Family Law Reform Act (1978) takes quite a different approach. It assumes a support obligation after five years of co-habitation or after one year and the birth of a child or if the relationship can be shown to be of a permanent nature.

Women on family benefits allowance report that they find the law pertaining to benefits and co-habitation humiliating and confusing. There is no clear statement of what it means to be 'not living with another person as husband and wife'. It is important to point out that the overwhelming majority of women on family benefits are not breaking the law. Ministry spokespeople estimate that no more than 1% of all FBA families break this regulation. It would seem that most mothers on family benefits follow this unfair and arbitrary ruling rather than risk their security and the security of their children.



Family Violence

Wife battering and abuse of children and the elderly are serious crimes which take place in the privacy of the family home. In response to a perceived need to bring family violence out in the open Health and Welfare, Canada has formed a National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. It will establish a network of organizations and individuals working in the area to enable them to share information and resources. The Clearinghouse will provide assistance in planning workshops and conferences, help organizations secure funding and provide information on how to develop community resources.

Susan Lee Painter, a psychologist, who has done post doctoral work on psychological effects of wife battering, is head of the Clearinghouse. She has been identifying groups across the country who need information about family violence and attempting to determine what kind of resource material they need. Groups who would like to receive information can write to the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Social Services Development and Grants Directorate, Health and Welfare, Canada.

Women in the Labour Force

Statistics Canada figures show the 55.6% of all women between the ages of 15 and 65 participated in the labour force in 1981. The participation rates were particularly high for women in their prime childbearing and rearing years: 76% of all Ontario women aged 20 - 24 and 70% of all Ontario women aged 25 - 44 were employed outside the home last year. These figures have strong implications for social policy, particularly in the area of childcare.

Education Report

In a recent report initiated by the Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Unit at the Ministry of Education, male and female educators were compared as to level of responsibility, experience, salary, qualifications and a field of study over an eight year period from 1972-1979.

Some of the findings follow.

At the elementary level, most of the teaching staff is female. Although men are in a minority (30%) at this level, in 1979 they held about 87% of the principalships and vice-principalships. Women actually lost ground in terms of principalships holding 4% fewer at the end of the eight year period.

At the secondary level, the male/female ratio is reversed. Seventy percent of the teaching staff is male, 30% are female. In 1979, 94% of principalships were held by men. The proportion of women occupying principal positions remained constant over the eight year period.

The Ontario study constructs a profile of the 'typical' male and female teacher.

A 'typical' male in 1979 would be between 30 and 39 years of age. He would hold a bachelor's degree. He would be a classroom teacher instructing one of the senior grades. His teaching experience would be in the 11 - 20 year range. He would be earning \$25,000 or more.

A 'typical' female teacher in 1979 would be between 30 and 39 years of age. She would have a bachelor's degree. As a classroom teacher, she would be employed in one of the primary grades. Her teaching experience would be in the 1 - 10 year interval and she would be earning a salary in the range of \$15,000 - \$20,000.

In light of these findings, Dr. H.K. Fisher, Deputy Minister of Education has strongly urged school boards to review internal recruitment policy and selection procedures to ensure that every effort is made to recruit and promote women to positions of responsibility.

U.N. Agreement Signed

Canada has recently ratified a United Nations agreement which calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and includes a clause in support of equal pay for work of equal value.